



WHERE THEY PLAY

**Creating Healthy  
Environments for  
Youth Athletes**



# THE COACH'S ROLE

Unique position to ensure health and safety of young athletes

Opportunities to recognize factors that affect children's health

Responsibility to take action and address concerns to promote healthier experiences for youth athletes



COACH

# ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINANTS

Chemicals or pollutants  
in:

- Air (breathing)
- Water (drinking)
- Food (eating)
- Soil (touching)

Can have a negative  
impact on human health





# HIGHER RISK OF CONTACT WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINANTS

## **CHILDREN:**

Eat more, drink more, and  
breathe more air than adults

Put their hands and other  
objects in their mouths

Play close to the ground

Spend more time outdoors

# YOUTH ATHLETES

EXPOSED TO  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONTAMINANTS

Indoors

Outdoors





# THE AIR IN THERE

## POOR INDOOR AIR QUALITY FROM:

Dirt and dust

Chemicals and chemical-  
containing products, such as  
cleaning products or paint

Mold (from leaking/corroding  
pipes)

Carbon monoxide (from poorly  
combusting furnaces)



# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

## **ATHLETES MIGHT HAVE:**

Coughing and sneezing

Headaches

Eye, nose, or throat irritation

Shortness of breath

Fatigue and dizziness

Nausea

Skin irritation



# PROTECT YOUR ATHLETES

Find out who is in charge of setting the schedule for routine facility cleaning and maintenance (infrastructure, heating and cooling systems)

Share your proposed game and practice schedule before the season begins

Ask if cleaning and maintenance can take place on days when athletes do not use the facility

Change location of games or practices if the venue is undergoing renovations or improvement projects



# THE AIR OUT THERE

## OZONE

Ground-level ozone, or smog, is often higher in the summer

Smog often peaks in the afternoon to early evening, when many practices and games are scheduled

# THE AIR OUT THERE

## VEHICLE IDLING

Idling vehicles give off air toxics and diesel exhaust

Air toxics are pollutants known or suspected to cause serious health effects

Diesel exhaust contains soot and nitrogen oxides, which contribute to forming smog





# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

## **ATHLETES MIGHT HAVE:**

Coughing

Eye, nose, or throat irritation

Chest tightness and shortness of breath

Asthma attacks

Respiratory problems, such as bronchitis



# PROTECT YOUR ATHLETES

Use the searchable Air Quality Index ([www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov)) to plan outdoor games and practices

Encourage caregivers to turn off car engines while waiting to pick up athletes

Schedule games and practices:

- Away from parking lots or high vehicle traffic areas
- When vehicle traffic is light
- When temperatures are cooler and outdoor air quality is better

# SECONDHAND SMOKE

Mixture of smoke given off by cigarettes, cigars, and pipes, and the smoke exhaled by smokers

Contains 4,000+ substances; several known to cause cancer in humans





# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

## **ATHLETES MIGHT HAVE:**

Asthma, in athletes with no prior symptoms

Aggravated asthma symptoms, including asthma attacks

Middle ear infections

Respiratory problems, such as bronchitis

Reduced lung function



# PROTECT YOUR ATHLETES

Schedule games and practices at smoke-free locations

Enforce a smoke-free policy when games and practices are not at smoke-free locations

Use regular communication with caregivers and spectators to urge them not to smoke at games and practices

# CLEANING CHEMICALS

**GOOD:** cleaning products remove dust, dirt, and allergens

**NOT SO GOOD:** chemicals in most conventional cleaning products can cause health problems





# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

## **ATHLETES MIGHT HAVE:**

Headaches and dizziness

Eye, nose, or throat irritation

Nausea

Asthma attacks

# PROTECT YOUR ATHLETES

Find out who is in charge of setting the schedule for routine cleaning

Share your proposed game and practice schedule before the season begins

Ask if cleaning can take place after, instead of before, games and practices or on days when athletes do not use the facility



A line of young athletes in blue and green uniforms stretching on a grassy field. The athletes are in a starting crouch, with their hands on their knees. The background is a blurred green field with a white goalpost.

# PESTICIDES

**GOOD:** prevent and kill pests—including insects, rodents, and weeds—on playing fields and park land, and in buildings

**NOT SO GOOD:** when used incorrectly, pesticides can be toxic and can cause serious health effects



# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

## **ATHLETES MIGHT HAVE:**

Headaches and dizziness

Weakness and nausea

Muscle twitching and tingling  
sensations

# PROTECT YOUR ATHLETES

Find out who handles pesticide application at indoor and outdoor game and practice locations

Ask for a pesticide application schedule

Schedule games and practices for times that do not coincide with or closely follow pesticide application



**KNOW MORE, DO MORE**

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Office of Children's Health Protection**

**[www2.epa.gov/children](http://www2.epa.gov/children)**

**Healthy Environments Coach's Checklist**

